

THE NEW DEFINES THE OLD. TRADITION AND MODERNITY OF ARCHITECTURE

NOWE DEFINIUJE STARE. TRADYCJA I NOWOCZESNOŚĆ ARCHITEKTURY

Abstract

Adaptations of historical structures are a peculiar chapter in architecture having its own rights. Their basic and unique is their inimitability. Architecture, however, cannot put on the pedestal only what is constant, existing since it is subject to the continuous evolution of the world rushing forward. For this reason, buildings with a historical connotation enriched with a modern element become a kind of hybrids combining tradition and modernity.

Keywords: tradition, history, modernity, adaptation, transformation, new, old, beauty, aesthetics, utility, functionality

Streszczenie

Pewien specyficzny i rządzący się własnymi prawami rozdział w architekturze stanowią adaptacje struktur historycznych. Ich podstawową i unikatową cechą jest niepowtarzalność. Architektura nie może jednakże wynosić na piedestał jedynie tego co stałe, istniejące, gdyż poddaje się ciągłej ewolucji pędzącego do przodu świata. Z tego względu budynki o konotacji historycznej wzbogacone nowoczesnym pierwiastkiem stają się swego rodzaju hybrydami łączącymi tradycję i nowoczesność.

Słowa kluczowe: tradycja, historia, nowoczesność, adaptacja, przebudowa, nowe, stare, piękno, estetyka, użyteczność, funkcjonalizm

Nowadays the growth of respect towards the richness of remembrance becomes a more and more common phenomenon. The tendency of the urge to escape from history, which was conditioned to a large extent by historical events, seems to fade. The social spirit that spread after the First World War filled with visions of a new beginning and bringing the need to break with the past had weakened. It may seem that Charles Baudelaire's notion has somehow been brought to life and along with it the "Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, which make up one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable"².

A series of realizations proves that some of the historic buildings are especially predestined to be brought under a new order. The recent years show general approval for ceasing destruction and demolishing which is replaced by actions leading to creating buildings which convey originality on the highest level. There are various reasons for the inability of the building to function as originally intended and do not end at bad technical condition.

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² B. Kuźniarz, *Architektura nowoczesności*, Idea, 2016, no. 2, p. 65.

They can be found primarily in the progress which continually changing the world brings new requirements.

It is worth remembering that creating structures based on modernity evinces not only in technological solutions but also in form and function which are significant for the evolution of architecture according to the formulaic yet seemingly trivial notion by Heraclitus of Ephesus – *Panta rhei*. Architecture cannot be based only on fixed patterns known from the last historical eras. Due to this fact, buildings with historical connotations become extremely fascinating when infused with the modern element. Then they transform into extraordinary hybrids combining both the tradition and modernity of architecture.

The aspect of the mindful choice of added elements becomes as crucial as giving the building the right function. Adapting the wrong solutions leads not only to a visual catastrophe but also to a public discussion for this kind of projects often attract public attention. The phenomenon of architecture lies in its simultaneous affiliation to the world of art and satisfying the needs that are directly linked with human existence and thus are meant to be respected. The loss of the historic structure which is a pattern permanently anchored in consciousness will always meet with objection. Also when it comes to the perception of adaptation as a conservation operation, the historic building should be guaranteed maximum respect. However, the advantages of taking action are incommensurable since it stops the perishing process and gives a chance for survival. Undoubtedly a building deserted even for a short time will be damaged to a lesser or greater extent both by natural causes and by the human element – devastation.

Expansions and adaptations which combine the old with the new are thoroughly original because they are impossible to copy. Thus the chosen method is uniquely original for every single one of them. Only in the case of buildings subject to the preservation office rules and regulations are also a significant filter. There is no recipe for the right steps leading to an accurate combination of the traditional elements with the new ones. Sometimes bringing the substance back to life involves a series of actions seemingly leading it to destruction. In that case destruction must be combined with the evolution method – after all, everything that stays will become a testament of the last century for the future generations.

The issue of shaping industrial buildings and areas has become very popular. They are often an immensely valuable legacy not only cultural but also architectural. Devoid of their previous function the spaces take various forms. Due to their nature, they are an excellent field for creative activity. The extraordinary aura that usually surrounds them in combination with the new function emphasized by the artistic activity shapes a brand new dimension of architecture.

At this point, it is worth recalling the realization from the year 1973 i.e. forty-six years ago when Ricardo Bofill decided to adapt a deserted cement factory for his home and office. This type of action was a novelty and the architect had somewhat anticipated the current trend. To implement his vision, Bofill found a large industrial complex consisting of over 30 silos, underground galleries, and huge engine rooms. The whole facility resembled a formation from a surreal dream. Completely deserted, partly ruined, created from massive reinforced concrete structures which in many spots did not reinforce anything – it was almost absurd. Still, all these elements made its acreage filled with magic which stimulated the designer to undertake two years of difficult renovation works.

The whole process started with the demolition of part of the existing structure leaving 8 silos. The objective was to uncover the interesting forms hiding between the fragments of the facility. Clearing of the construction allowed to redefine the space. By the adaptation the

historic factory complex was defined with an innovative function – an office, model laboratory, archive, library, screening room, and also a vast exhibition space called “The Cathedral”. The form was additionally enhanced by its surroundings. The complex is enshrouded in eucalyptus, palm trees, olive trees, and cypresses gardens.

This project proves best that a seemingly useless architectural composition aided by an unlimited imagination of the designer and hard work can transform into a magnificent building. It is a medium of both history and sophisticated modern architecture. Even though the implementation is years old it still has a stunning impression on the recipients.

When it comes to Polish examples of revitalizing a postindustrial facility Bolko Loft stands out with its author and owner Przemko Łukasik. This pioneering project was created in an old miners’ lamp room in Orzeł Biały – a mining and metallurgy plant in Bytom closed since the 1990s. As many as forty-four postindustrial stairs lead to the building, and its form consists of two cuboids – vertical and horizontal. Erected to a height of eight and a half meters, the living space has two hundred square meters. The layout of the rooms of the old lamp house did not change during the adaptation, but it was functionally divided into two parts – the living space and the bedroom. Citing the author’s words: “Renovation had one main goal – to leave everything that’s possible, not to get rid of traces of history. – We wanted to commune with what the object used to be”³.

Bolko Loft gained exceptional sympathy due to its originality not only in Poland but also abroad. Interestingly, the idea was born primarily for financial reasons – a large area was available at a favorable price. In turn, this resulted in the desire to prove that you can comfortably live in this type of facility. Thus, it is a kind of manifesto for adopting a certain lifestyle. It illustrates attachment to the industrial tradition in Silesia and strongly opposes the tendency to devastate its landscape.

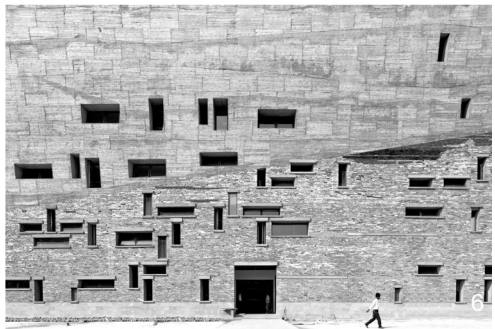
This project for the Medusa Group was a pioneering action that has currently initiated the most characteristic aspect of the activity of this architectural office. “All revitalization projects of the group are accompanied by the belief that it is necessary to maintain the strict nature of the buildings, in line with their original purpose. This assumption results in materials used in the interiors: concrete, brick or wood used in such a way as to emphasize their natural texture”⁴. This approach fits perfectly not only the specific character of this type of building but also the realities beloved by modern architecture. The use of these materials perfectly combines tradition and modernity.

Moving to another continent, it is also worth quoting an extremely interesting approach to combining the old with the new presented by the attitude of Wang Shu – a Chinese architect who won the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2012. For many years, the designer explored the secrets of traditional building methods and shaping objects. He based his work on the modification of old techniques and materials, adapting them to the requirements of modern architecture. As a result, the buildings emanate with a message carrying understanding for tradition and ensure the survival of cultural patterns.

The quintessence of Wang Shu’s logic was incorporated in the project of the Historical Museum in Ningbo, from 2008. This project cannot be called an adaptation, however, it carries its unusual elements. It was not created based on the existing structure that could be reused but was created from traditional recycled materials. In the case of China, the issue of corre-

³ <https://internityhome.pl/poznawaj/mieszkania-architektow-przemo-lukasik-bolko-loft/>

⁴ <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/medusa-group-architects>



spondence between traditional and modern architecture is currently the leading one. Rapid urbanization processes pose a dilemma in shaping urban fabric. The elements added to the landscape must interact with it or stand out against it, creating a harmonious relationship based on the principle of contrast. Wang Shu “Goes beyond this dispute, creates an architecture that is timeless, deeply rooted in the local context and at the same time universal”⁵.

Portugal can boast about an extraordinary, ruin-based house project on the island of Pico. Existing stone walls have become the basis for the object designed by SAMI – Arquitectos. Volcanic rock is the traditional material in this region and thus it was used to build the original form.

Similarly to all the surrounding buildings, the cottage consisted of a living space on the second floor and a space intended for animals on the first. The unused building eventually fell into ruin, and the architect, after noticing it, decided to give it a new life. Drawing on the existing structure, he added windows fitted into the original openings, thanks to which he compiled the suitable views. The new construction made of concrete contrasts quite strongly with the dark color of the basalt stone, and also refers to the texture of a rock. Altogether it harmonizes perfectly with the surrounding landscape, and the E/C House block, although clearly divided into what is traditional and new, creates a very coherent entity. Without knowing the history of this unusual form, it is difficult to notice that the structure is rooted in the past because in the initial perception it is simply classified as a modern work of modern architecture.

Recently, the adaptation of sacred places has become a lively topic. Unused temples are increasingly being desacralized and transformed into buildings related to culture, housing, and even acting as restaurants, hotels, kindergartens, and even discos. They are often a great field for acting on the artistic ground, creating ideal conditions for contemplation and communing with it. The worldview conditioned by a conservative approach, especially in the case of Poles, causes misunderstanding and opposition to such activities. In a wider context these artistic experiments, which are not supposed to provoke anything, may lead to the creation of immensely interesting architecture.

Such was the case of the Saint Francis monastery (Convent de Sant Francesc) in Spain reconstructed and adapted by David Closes. In this case, the monastery from the 17th century was converted into a cultural facility. The architect focused on adding strongly geometric elements to the historic structure. The structure was in ruins, and new elements strengthened it. Because they are mostly made of glass, they enabled letting the right amount of light in spreading majestically around the interior. The new elements were visibly distinguished from the old ones and the traces of the past carried by the building were not erased. Therefore, numerous deficiencies, clear depressions, holes, and voids after the missing altars are visible. One may wonder if such an approach makes sense. Does the typical recipient not

⁵ D. Szymańska, *Fenomen urbanizacji i procesy z nim związane*, Toruń, 2016, p. 21.

- Ill. 1. La Fabrica, phot. Courtesy of Ricardo Bofill, Richard Powers
- Ill. 2. La Fabrica, phot. Courtesy of Ricardo Bofill, Richard Powers
- Ill. 3. Bolko Loft, phot. Daniel Chrobak, Jan Lutyk
- Ill. 4. Bolko Loft, phot. Daniel Chrobak, Jan Lutyk
- Ill. 5. Ningbo Historic Museum, phot. Iwan Baan
- Ill. 6. Ningbo Historic Museum, phot. Iwan Baan
- Ill. 7. E/C House, phot. Paulo Catrica

like what is smooth and “repaired”? It is worth mentioning that these superficial defects constitute a testament to the existence of the building. Understanding this problem may be eased by the thought of Maria Gołaszewska: “Aesthetic value is potentially not only in works of art, but also in all other human creations and phenomena and creations of nature, and aesthetic assessment has an intersubjective sense and can be verified, for example, using psychology techniques and sociology”⁶. This unique architectural intervention allowed keeping the historical heritage by adding new values to it. Powerful in reception, dynamic elements enrich the old monastery creating an exceptional modern form. Undoubtedly, they add an enormous expressive power and in a way redefine it into a completely different function.

Noteworthy is the unconventional project by Haworth Tompkins, located on the banks of the English river Alde. The designer decided to transform the outdated structure of the loft from the Victorian era. The structure, previously inhabited by birds was transformed into a modern art studio. The brick form has been supplemented with a compatible Corten weathering steel superstructure. Modern interiors were kept in a spirit of minimalism with concrete floors, and the walls lined with plywood. The whole idea of the project, in this case, is based on creating a separate structure which grows out of the ossified, traditional shell. According to the word of the architect “The result is a building that from a distance evokes the ghost of the original structure, but, seen from close to, reveals itself as entirely new”⁷. Combining the entirely traditional building with a very modern block additionally strengthened by the material used, gave a surprising effect. It would seem that a small, outdated building is not worth any interest. A breath of modernity, however, allowed to breathe a whole new life into it.

Nowadays, the issue of combining tradition with modernity is extremely alive. More and more often architects decide to create hybrids, which are a combination of old structures with new ones, and as the examples cited prove, these objects can be wonderful and extremely interesting buildings.

Interference in structures with historical connotations often arouses great interest. Frequently, people completely unconnected and without directional knowledge in a given topic take the floor. This is because familiar objects, firmly anchored in the social subconscious, evoke greater emotions.

People are afraid of new things, it is easier for them to rely on old, safe schemes of action. However, it should be remembered that in architecture, as in every area of life, it is worth looking for innovative solutions. What is new gives the old structure a completely new meaning – wakes it up again. Objects are reborn almost from ashes and emerge in a completely different form. It is a great way for them to be saved from total oblivion, allowing new generations to learn more about the traces of the past. Enriched with a new element, they demonstrate functional flexibility in adapting to the times, simultaneously being a relic of the past.

Adaptations supplemented with remodeling create a completely new dimension of aesthetics, allowing the creation of extremely original and unusual designs. The factor of repetition is completely strange here, because the existing structure, degraded in a certain way is the only one in the whole world. The dialogue of juxtaposed forms is usually surprising. There is

⁶ M. Gołaszewska, *Estetyka współczesności*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2001, p. 138.

⁷ <https://www.archdaily.com/89980/dovecote-studio-haworth-tompkins>



- III. 8. E/C House, phot. Paulo Catrica
III. 9. Convent de Sant Francesc, phot. Jordi Surroca
III. 10. Convent de Sant Francesc, phot. Jordi Surroca
III. 11. Dovecote Studio, phot. Philip Vile
III. 12. Dovecote Studio, phot. Philip Vile

no doubt, that they amaze the most, but also impress with the modern elements added to the existing structure. It can be clearly stated that these types of objects are creations enchanted which both tradition and innovation. Through these actions, modernity within the framework of history redefines the architectural object.

References

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